

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ES.I INTRODUCTION

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) directs the United States (US) Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop and periodically revise or amend its resource management plans (RMPs), which guide management of BLM-administered lands. This RMP and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) describes and analyzes alternatives for the future management of public lands and resources the BLM administers within the Bighorn Basin planning area.

The BLM Bighorn Basin Proposed Plan provides a layered management approach that offers the highest level of protection for Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) in the most valuable habitat. Land use allocations in the Proposed Plan would limit or eliminate new surface disturbance in Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA), while minimizing disturbance in General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA).¹ In addition to establishing protective land use allocations, the Proposed Plan would implement a suite of management tools, such as disturbance limits, GRSG habitat objectives and monitoring, mitigation approaches, adaptive management triggers and responses, and other protective measures throughout the range. These overlapping and reinforcing conservation measures will work in concert to improve and restore GRSG habitat condition and provide consistency in how the BLM will manage activities in GRSG habitat in the planning area.

¹ For the Proposed RMP and Final EIS, GRSG habitat nomenclature has been changed from Core Areas to Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA) and Non-Core Sage Grouse Habitat to General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA).

ES.1.1 Rationale and Relationship to the Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy

The Bighorn Basin RMP addresses the March 2010 US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 12-Month Finding for Petitions to List the GRSG (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) as Threatened or Endangered (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010). In that finding, the USFWS concluded that GRSG was “warranted, but precluded” for listing as a threatened or endangered species. A “warranted, but precluded” determination is one of three results that may occur after a petition is filed by the public to list a species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This finding indicates that immediate publication of a proposed rule to list the species is precluded by higher-priority listing proposals; that is, a species should be listed based on the available science, but listing other species takes priority because they are more in need of protection.

The USFWS reviewed the status of and threats to the GRSG in relation to the five listing factors provided in Section 4(a)(1) of the ESA. Of the five listing factors reviewed, the USFWS determined that Factor A, “the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the habitat or range of the GRSG,” and Factor D, “the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms,” posed “a significant threat to the GRSG now and in the foreseeable future” (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010). The USFWS identified the principal regulatory mechanisms for the BLM as conservation measures in land use plans (LUPs).

The Bighorn Basin RMP is one of the 15 RMP revisions and amendments and EISs being prepared by the BLM as part of the National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy (BLM 2011).² These documents provide a set of management alternatives focused on specific conservation measures across the range of the GRSG (see **Figure ES-1**, Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy Boundaries).

² BLM (US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management). 2011. Instruction Memorandum 2012-044, BLM National. Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Planning Strategy. Washington, DC. December 27, 2011.

Figure ES-1



Science-based decision making and collaboration with state and local partners are fundamental to the GRSG Planning Strategy. The 15 GRSG EISs address threats to GRSG identified by state fish and wildlife agencies, the BLM National Technical Team, and the USFWS in the context of its listing decision and the Conservation Objectives Team (COT) report. The COT report was prepared by wildlife biologists from state and federal agencies and provides a blueprint for the overall conservation approach set forth in the BLM GRSG EISs (USFWS 2013).³ Where consistent with conservation objectives, the GRSG LUP/EISs adopt unique state- and stakeholder-developed approaches and priorities. Additional science-based reviews by the US Geological Survey and related scientific literature provided further guidance on specific issues that arose in developing the final BLM and Forest Service GRSG LUP/EISs. In addition, regular meetings with the Western Governors Association Sage-Grouse Task Force provided additional opportunities for coordination with member states.⁴

³ USFWS (US Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service). 2013. Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) Conservation Objectives: Final Report. USFWS, Denver, CO. February 2013.

⁴ The Western Governors Association Sage-Grouse Task Force works to identify and implement high priority conservation actions and integrate ongoing actions necessary to preclude the need for the GRSG to be listed under the ESA. The Task Force includes designees from the 11 western states where GRSG is found as well as representatives from USFWS, BLM, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Forest Service, United States Geological Survey, and Department of the Interior.

ES.1.2 Description of the Planning Area and Habitat Management Areas

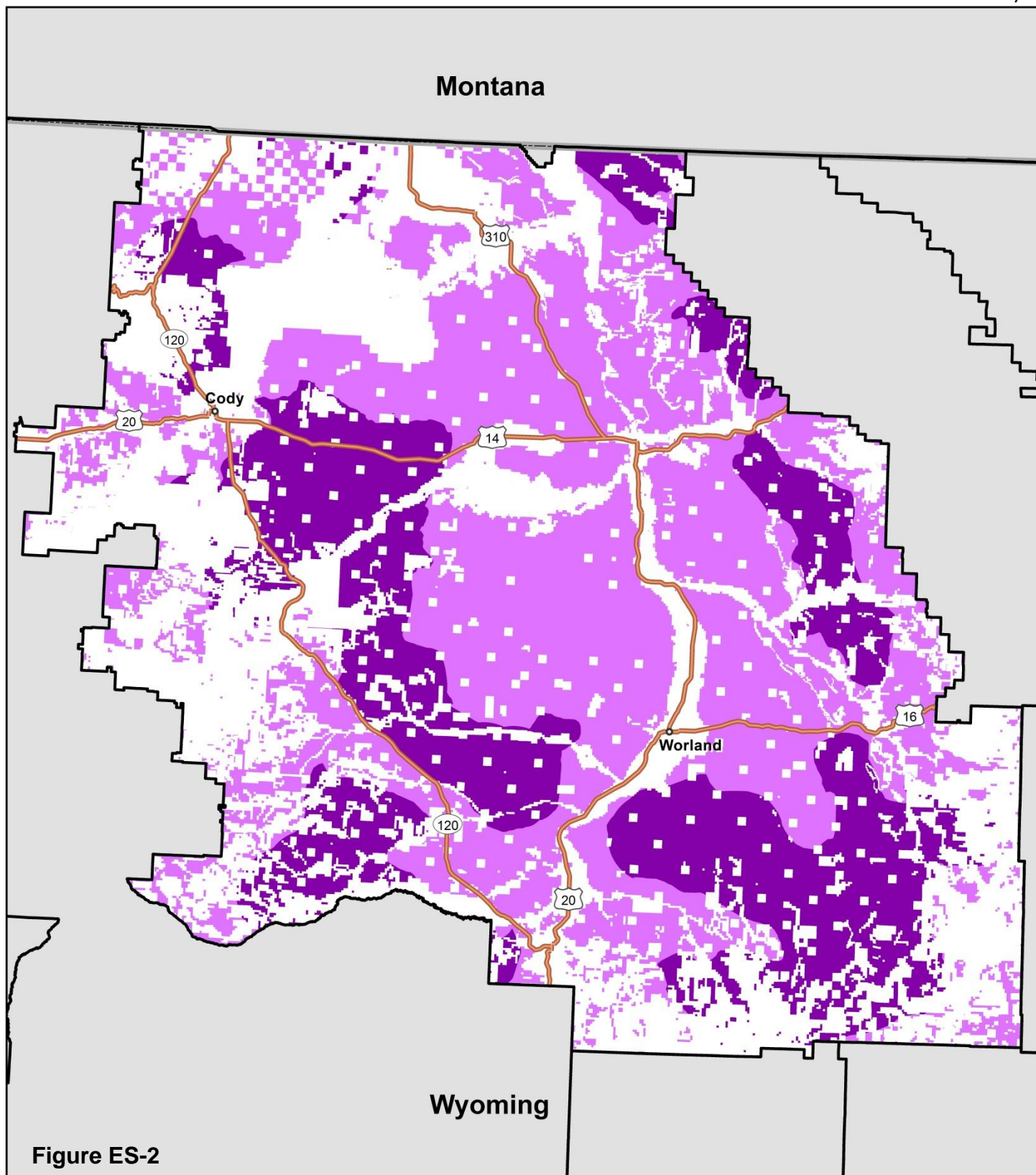
The planning area is the geographic area within which the BLM will make decisions during this planning effort. The planning area boundary includes all lands regardless of jurisdiction. The Bighorn Basin RMP planning area covers approximately 5.6 million acres of federal, state, and private lands in four Wyoming counties (Big Horn, Park, Washakie, and Hot Springs). Of the total area, 3.2 million acres are BLM-administered surface lands and 4.2 million acres are federal mineral estate.

While the planning area consists of all lands regardless of ownership, decisions resulting from Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS would apply only to BLM-administered lands, including surface and split-estate lands with BLM-administered subsurface mineral rights. **Chapter 3**, Affected Environment, describes the current resource and resource use conditions in the planning area.

As part of the National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy, GRSG habitat on BLM-administered lands in the decision area consists of lands allocated as PHMA and GHMA (**Figure ES-2**, Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Areas – Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS, and **Table ES-1**, Habitat Management Areas in the Bighorn Basin Planning Area). PHMA and GHMA are defined as follows:

- PHMA (1,115,100 acres): BLM-administered lands identified as having the highest value to maintaining sustainable GRSG populations. The boundaries and management strategies for PHMA are derived from and generally follow the Core Area boundaries identified in the Draft RMP/EIS. PHMA was identified in coordination with the State of Wyoming. Areas of PHMA largely coincide with areas identified as Priority Areas for Conservation in the COT report.
- GHMA (2,034,000 acres): BLM-administered lands that require some special management to sustain GRSG populations. GHMA was identified in coordination with the State of Wyoming.

The planning area includes other BLM-administered lands that are not allocated as habitat management areas for GRSG. These lands would be managed as described in **Chapter 2**, Alternatives.



Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Areas - Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS

- BLM Priority Habitat Management Areas
- BLM General Habitat Management Areas
- Other BLM Lands
- Private, State, and Other Federal Lands
- EIS Boundary
- State Boundary



0 10 20 Miles

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data is not guaranteed.

Map Area



Table ES-1
Habitat Management Areas in the Bighorn Basin Planning Area

Habitat Management Area	Acres of BLM-administered Lands	Percent of BLM-administered Lands in Planning Area
PHMA	1,115,100	35
GHMA	2,034,000	64
Other BLM-administered lands	38,100	1

ES.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The BLM currently administers public lands in the planning area according to three plans – the Cody RMP (BLM 1990)⁵ for the Cody Field Office (CYFO) and the Washakie RMP (BLM 1988)⁶ and Grass Creek RMP (BLM 1998)⁷ for the Worland Field Office (WFO). Although these existing plans have been updated since the BLM adopted them, new data have become available, and laws, regulations, and policies regarding management of these public lands have changed. In addition, decisions in the existing plans do not satisfactorily address all new and emerging issues in the planning area. These changes and potential deficiencies created the need to revise the existing plans.

The purpose of this RMP revision project is to ensure that public lands are managed according to the principles of multiple use identified in FLPMA, while maintaining valid existing rights and other obligations already established. The new RMPs will address the changing needs of the planning area and create a management strategy that best achieves a combination of the following planning issues within the framework of the planning criteria.

- Employing a community-based planning approach to seek broadly supported solutions to issues, and collaborate with federal, state, and local cooperating agencies.
- Establishing goals and objectives for managing resources and resource uses in the approximately 3.2 million surface acres and 4.2 million acres of federal mineral estate in the planning area administered by the BLM CYFO and WFO in accordance with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.
- Identifying land use plan decisions to guide future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions.

⁵ BLM. 1990. Cody Resource Management Plan. Worland, WY.

⁶ BLM. 1988. Washakie Resource Management Plan. Worland, WY.

⁷ BLM. 1998. Grass Creek Resource Management Plan. Worland, WY.

- Identifying management actions and allowable uses anticipated to achieve the established goals and objectives and reach desired outcomes.
- Providing comprehensive management direction by making land use decisions for all appropriate resources and resource uses the BLM administers in the planning area.
- Providing for compliance with applicable tribal, federal, and state laws, standards, and implementation plans, and BLM policies and regulations.
- Recognizing the Nation's need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber.
- Retaining flexibility to adapt to new and emerging issues and opportunities and to provide for adjustments to decisions over time based on new information and monitoring.
- Striving to be compatible with the plans and policies of adjacent local, state, tribal, and federal agencies and consistent with federal laws, regulations, and BLM policies; and be flexible enough to adapt to future BLM policy and guidance updates.

This RMP with associated EIS is needed to respond to the USFWS's March 2010 "warranted, but precluded" ESA listing petition decision (75 *Federal Register* 13910, March 23, 2010). The USFWS identified inadequacy of regulatory mechanisms as a significant factor in its finding on the petition to list the GRSG. In its listing decision, the USFWS noted that changes in management of GRSG habitats are necessary to avoid the continued decline of GRSG populations. Changes in land allocations and conservation measures in the BLM RMPs provide a means to implement regulatory mechanisms to address the inadequacy identified by the USFWS.

ES.3 PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed federal action is the Proposed Plan, which identifies resource management actions in accordance with the multiple-use and sustained-yield mandates of FLPMA. The proposed action is also intended to provide a consistent framework for managing GRSG and its habitat on BLM-administered land. The alternatives, including the Proposed Plan, comprise desired future outcomes and a range of management actions, allowable uses, and land use allocations that guide management on BLM-administered lands. The Proposed Plan (see **Section ES.6**, Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Proposed Plan and Environmental Effects) represents the agencies' approach for addressing the purpose and need.

ES.4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE RMP/EIS

ES.4.1 Scoping

A Notice of Intent (NOI) published in the Federal Register on October 17, 2008, formally announced the BLM's intent to revise the existing plans and prepare the associated EIS. Publication of the NOI initiated the scoping process and invited affected and interested agencies, organizations, and the general public to participate in determining the scope and issues to be addressed by alternatives and analyses in the EIS. The BLM held six public scoping meetings in Thermopolis, Worland, Greybull, Cody, Powell, and Lovell, Wyoming, between November 5 and 14, 2008. The six scoping meetings provided the public with an opportunity to learn and ask questions about the project and the planning process and to submit their issues and concerns to the BLM. In addition to members of the BLM Interdisciplinary Team, 381 people attended the scoping meetings. The BLM collected comments from the public during the scoping meetings and throughout the scoping period. The final Scoping Summary Report, available online at <http://www.blm.gov/wol/st/en/prog/more/sagegrouse.html>, prepared in conjunction with all the GRSB LUPAs, summarizes the scoping and issue-identification process and describes 13 broad issue categories identified during the scoping process.

ES.4.2 Cooperating Agency Collaboration

The BLM invited local, state, federal, and tribal representatives to participate as cooperating agencies on the Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS. The BLM invited these entities to participate because they have jurisdiction by law or because they could offer special expertise. Big Horn, Hot Springs, Park, and Washakie County Commissions, as well as seven local conservation districts, agreed to participate as cooperating agencies in the RMP revision. The State of Wyoming and the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service accepted cooperating agency status as well. The BLM and cooperating agencies participated in six workshops to formulate alternatives and multiple meetings to keep cooperating agencies informed and to solicit their input. Development of this Proposed RMP and Final EIS considered comments from cooperating agencies on the Draft RMP and Draft EIS and previous administrative drafts.

The BLM also invited Native American tribes to be cooperating agencies as part of the RMP revision and conducted ongoing coordination, including two letters, multiple phone calls, and face-to-face meetings. The BLM held a cooperating agency workshop on January 31, 2013, and sent tribal consultation letters to update cooperators and tribes on the status of the RMP revision process and the need to prepare a Supplement to the Draft RMP and Draft EIS. In addition, the BLM met with tribes in government-to-government consultation throughout the RMP process.

ES.4.3 Development of the Draft RMP/EIS

Development of Management Alternatives

In accordance with NEPA and the CEQ implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500), the planning team considered public input and developed a reasonable range of alternatives for the Draft RMP/EIS.

The planning team developed four unique alternatives, including one No Action Alternative and three action alternatives, which were subsequently analyzed in the Draft RMP/EIS. Each of the preliminary action alternatives was designed to:

- Address the 16 planning issues
- Fulfill the purpose and need for the RMP
- Meet the multiple-use and sustained-yield mandate of FLPMA
- Respond to USFWS-identified issues and threats to GRSG and its habitat, including specific threats identified in the COT report

Collectively, the three action alternatives (Alternatives B, C, and D) analyzed in the Draft RMP/EIS offered a range of possible management approaches for responding to the purpose and need as well as the planning issues and concerns identified through public scoping. While the overarching goal of the long-term conservation of GRSG and its habitat is the same across alternatives, each alternative contains a discrete set of objectives and management actions, which if selected as the final plan, would constitute a unique RMP.

Publication of Draft RMP/EIS

Public Comment Period

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Bighorn Basin Draft RMP and Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on April 22, 2011, initiating the 90-day public comment period. At the request of the public and cooperating agencies, the BLM extended the comment period by 45 days, for a total comment period of 135 days. The comment period ended on September 7, 2011. The BLM held six public meetings in Thermopolis, Worland, Greybull, Cody, Powell, and Lovell, Wyoming. Written public comments were reviewed and considered by the BLM.

After release of the Draft RMP/EIS in April 2011, new data, changing circumstances, and emerging issues led the BLM Rocky Mountain Regional Interdisciplinary Team to conclude a Supplement was needed, as listed below. The Proposed RMP and Final EIS integrate content from the Draft RMP/EIS and the Supplement.

- Based on the identified threats to the GRSG and the USFWS timeline for making a listing decision on this species, the BLM announced (August 2011) the National GRSG Planning Strategy Charter. The charter requires the development of new or revised

regulatory mechanisms, through RMPs, to conserve and restore the GRSG and its habitat on BLM-administered lands on a range-wide basis over the long term.

- Three new sources of important data became available: The GRSG NTT Report on National GRSG Conservation Measures; the GRSG Baseline Environmental Report (Manier et al. 2013); and the GRSG Conservation Objectives Team (COT) Final Report.
- In December 2011, a Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in the Federal Register to initiate preparation of EISs and Supplemental EISs to Incorporate GRSG Conservation Measures into Land Use Plans and Land Management Plans in accordance with the BLM National GRSG Planning Strategy.
- In late December 2011, the BLM Washington Office released Instruction Memorandum No. 2012-044, which directed all of the planning efforts across the GRSG range to consider all applicable conservation measures when revising or amending its RMPs in GRSG habitat, including the measures developed by the National Technical Team that were presented in their December 2011 document – A Report on National GRSG Conservation Measures.
- In 2012, the Director of the USFWS asked the COT to produce recommendations regarding the degree to which the threats to GRSG need to be reduced or ameliorated so that the species would no longer be in danger of extinction or likely to become in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future.

Publication of Supplemental Draft RMP/EIS

The BLM published the NOA for a Supplement to the Bighorn Basin Draft RMP/ EIS for public review and comment in the Federal Register on July 12, 2013, initiating the 90-day public comment period. The BLM later extended the comment period for an additional 20 days, ending the comment period on November 1, 2013. During the 110-day comment period, the BLM held six public meetings (in the same locations as meetings on the Draft RMP/ EIS) to discuss the content of the Supplement.

Comment Analysis

During the public comment periods, the BLM received thousands of written comments by mail, email, and submissions at the public meetings. Comments covered a wide spectrum of thoughts, opinions, ideas, and concerns. Upon receipt, the BLM reviewed the comments, grouped similar substantive comments under an appropriate topic heading, and evaluated and crafted summary responses addressing the comment topics. The response indicated whether or not the commenters' points would result in new information or changes being included in the Final RMP/EIS. In many circumstances, public comments prompted such changes to the Draft and Supplemental RMP/EIS.

Appendix A, Comment Analysis, provides a detailed description of the comment analysis methodology and an overview of the public comments received.

ES.5 RMP/EIS ALTERNATIVES AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

ES.5.1 Alternative A – No Action

The No Action Alternative represents continuation of current management and provides a baseline from which to identify potential environmental consequences when compared to the action alternatives. The No Action Alternative describes current resource and land management direction as represented in the Cody RMP (BLM 1990) for the CYFO and the Washakie RMP (BLM 1988a) and Grass Creek RMP (BLM 1998a) for the WFO, and associated habitat management plans, maintenance actions, and updates. Current management identifies constraints on mineral leasing in the planning area to protect resource values. Current management includes nine Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), one National Back Country Byway, one National Historic Landmark, and one National Historic Trail (NHT). This alternative also includes 20 Wild and Scenic River (WSR) eligible waterways, each with interim protective management, and 10 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). The BLM maintains seven Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) under Alternative A and allows livestock grazing on all but 5,008 acres of the planning area.

Current management includes stipulations and seasonal restrictions for surface-disturbing and disruptive activities to protect sensitive wildlife areas, such as occupied GRSF leks and crucial winter range and migration corridors for big game.

ES.5.2 Alternative B

Alternative B is based on the conservation measures developed by the BLM National Technical Team (NTT) planning effort described in Instruction Memorandum (IM) No. WO-2012-044. As directed in the IM, the conservation measures developed by the NTT must be considered and analyzed, as appropriate, through the land use planning and NEPA processes by all BLM state and field offices that contain occupied GRSF habitat. Alternative B emphasizes conservation of physical, biological, heritage, and visual resources, and lands with wilderness characteristics, with constraints on resource uses. Alternative B conserves large areas of land for physical, biological, and heritage resources; designates 17 ACECs; and places a number of restrictions on motorized vehicle use and mineral development. Alternative B retains the current National Back Country Byway, designates two additional back country byways, and applies protective management prescriptions to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center National Historic Landmark, Nez Perce NHT, and other important historic and regional trails. All lands with wilderness characteristics under Alternative B are specifically managed to preserve their wilderness characteristics. Alternative B also applies additional constraints on travel within the 10 WSAs in comparison

to Alternative A. The BLM designates 12 SRMAs under Alternative B and closes 1,984,211 acres to livestock grazing in the planning area. This alternative maintains contiguous blocks of vegetation and habitat on BLM-administered lands.

Alternative B identifies protective measures for GRSG habitat. Restrictions on surface-disturbing and disruptive activities (e.g., oil and gas leasing closures and ROW avoidance areas) in sensitive wildlife habitats are generally more prohibitive under Alternative B than Alternative A, and the size of protective buffers is increased around areas of specific management concern such as occupied GRSG leks.

ES.5.3 Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes resource uses and reduces constraints on resource uses to protect physical, biological, and heritage and visual resources. Compared to other alternatives, Alternative C conserves the least land area for physical, biological, and heritage resources; designates the fewest ACECs (2) and SRMAs (1); and is the least restrictive to motorized vehicle use and mineral development. The BLM delineates Oil and Gas Management Areas around intensively developed existing fields to be managed primarily for oil and gas exploration and development. Alternative C carries forward the current management of National Back Country Byways and applies similar, but more protective, management to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center National Historic Landmark and Nez Perce NHT than Alternative A. Under this alternative, the BLM manages all 20 WSR eligible waterways as unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System and releases these areas to other uses. The BLM manages lands with wilderness characteristics consistent with other resource objectives. Alternative C limits motorized vehicle use to designated roads and trails within the 10 WSAs. The BLM does not maintain contiguous blocks of native plant communities or minimize fragmentation. This alternative exempts Oil and Gas Management Areas and right-of-way (ROW) corridors from discretionary wildlife seasonal stipulations and allows the BLM to manage motorized vehicle use in big game crucial winter range consistent with other resource objectives.

Alternative C identifies protective measures for GRSG habitat. Under Alternative C, the BLM applies the same restrictions (outside of Oil and Gas Management Areas and ROW corridors) on surface-disturbing and disruptive activities for occupied GRSG leks and the same timing restrictions for GRSG winter concentration areas as under Alternative A.

ES.5.4 Alternative D (Proposed Plan)

Alternative D generally increases conservation of physical, biological, and heritage and visual resources compared to current management, including the designation of 1 Special Management Area, 2 Management Areas, and 12 ACECs. Alternative D also emphasizes moderate constraints on resource uses,

while applying specific reclamation and mitigation requirements to reduce impacts to resource values. Alternative D delineates Oil and Gas Management Areas, although smaller in size than Alternative C, to be managed primarily for oil and gas exploration and development. In addition to retaining the current National Back Country Byway, Alternative D would consider the designation of new National Back Country Byways on a case-by-case basis. Alternative D would also provide similar but less protective measures than Alternative B for the Heart Mountain Relocation Center National Historic Landmark, Nez Perce NHT, and other trails. The BLM manages all 20 WSR-eligible waterways as unsuitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. No lands are specifically managed to protect wilderness characteristics under Alternative D. Alternative D limits motorized vehicle use to designated roads and trails within six WSAs and closes four WSAs to motorized vehicle use. Vegetation resources are managed to maintain contiguous blocks of native plant communities. Alternative D exempts Oil and Gas Management Areas from discretionary big game seasonal stipulations, but places additional stipulations on oil and gas-related surface disturbances within the Absaroka Front, Fifteenmile, and Big Horn Front Master Leasing Plan areas.

Alternative D identifies protective measures for GRSG habitat consistent with the State of Wyoming Core Area Strategy. Alternative D generally applies greater restrictions on surface disturbance and disruptive activities to protect sensitive wildlife habitats, including occupied GRSG leks, than Alternative A.

ES.5.5 Alternative E

Management under Alternative E is the same as under Alternative B, except that Alternative E designates GRSG Key Habitat Areas (PHMA) as an ACEC (1,232,583 acres) for the conservation of GRSG priority habitat. Alternative E manages disturbances (e.g., roads, oil and gas wells, and pipelines) in the GRSG Key Habitat Areas ACEC to not exceed 1 disturbance per 640 acres and cover less than 3 percent of the total GRSG habitat. It also requires beneficial reclamation and rehabilitation activities that prioritize reestablishment of native vegetation communities in sagebrush steppe communities.

Due to additional management actions associated with the GRSG Key Habitat Areas ACEC, Alternative E exceeds Alternative B, as well as the other alternatives, in the amount of land conserved for physical, biological, and heritage and visual resources; the number of designated ACECs (18); and restrictions on minerals, ROWs, and renewable energy development.

ES.5.6 Alternative F

Management under Alternative F is the same as under Alternative D, except that Alternative F designates GRSG Core Areas (PHMA) as an ACEC (1,116,698 acres) for the conservation of GRSG priority habitat. Additionally, Alternative F manages nine areas to maintain their wilderness characteristics; the remaining lands with wilderness characteristics under Alternative F would not be

specifically managed to maintain their wilderness characteristics. Management for livestock grazing under Alternative F would be the same as Alternative D, except within the GRSG PHMA ACEC, where additional restrictions on livestock grazing would incorporate GRSG habitat management objectives.

In the GRSG PHMA ACEC, the BLM manages the density of disturbance to not exceed an average of 1 disruptive activity location per 640 acres and cover less than 3 percent of the total GRSG PHMA. Alternative F delineates the same Oil and Gas Management Areas as Alternative D, but applies additional restrictions for the protection of GRSG where these areas overlap the GRSG PHMA ACEC.

ES.6 GREATER SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PROPOSED PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

In consideration of public comments, best science, cooperating agency coordination, and internal review of the Draft and Supplemental RMP/EIS, the BLM developed this Proposed Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse Habitat Management (Proposed Plan). The Proposed Plan represents the BLM's proposed approach for meeting the purpose and need consistent with the agency's legal and policy mandates.

The BLM Proposed Plan addresses threats to GRSG and its habitat identified by the USFWS in the March 2010 listing decision that apply to the Bighorn Basin planning area as well as threats described in the COT report. The Proposed Plan seeks to provide greater regulatory certainty for management actions intended to conserve the GRSG (**Table ES-2, Key Components of the Bighorn Basin Proposed Plan Addressing COT Report Threats**). In making its determination of whether the GRSG is warranted to be listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, the USFWS will evaluate the degree to which land use planning decisions proposed in this RMP/EIS address threats to GRSG and its habitat.

The Proposed Plan would maintain and enhance GRSG populations and habitat. The Proposed Plan benefits GRSG populations by eliminating disturbance near leks and other key areas.

The Proposed Plan establishes conditions, subject to valid existing rights, for new anthropogenic activities to ensure a net conservation gain to GRSG in PHMA. The Proposed Plan would reduce habitat disturbance and fragmentation through limitations on surface-disturbing activities, while addressing changes in resource condition and use through monitoring and adaptive management. The Proposed Plan provides a framework for prioritizing areas in PHMA for wildfire, invasive annual grass, and conifer treatments, which will maintain and enhance GRSG habitat.

The Proposed Plan is built upon the foundation for GRSG management established by and complementary to the Governor's Executive Order 2011-05, Greater Sage Grouse Core Area Protection (Core Area Strategy) (Wyoming

Office of the Governor 2011) by establishing similar conservation measures and focusing restoration efforts in the same key areas most valuable to GRSG.

For a full description of the Proposed Plan, see **Chapter 2**.

Table ES-2
Key Components of the Bighorn Basin Proposed Plan Addressing COT Report Threats

Threats to GRSG and its Habitat (from COT Report)	Key Component of the Bighorn Basin Proposed Plan
All Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Adaptive Management Plan, which provides regulatory assurance that unintended negative impacts to GRSG habitat will be addressed before consequences become severe or irreversible. • PHMA: Require and ensure mitigation that provides a net conservation gain to GRSG. • Monitor implementation and effectiveness of conservation measures in GRSG habitats according to the Habitat Assessment Framework. • Apply Required Design Features (RDFs) when authorizing actions in GRSG habitat. • Prioritize the leasing and development of fluid mineral resources outside GRSG habitat.
All development threats, including mining, infrastructure, and energy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Implement an anthropogenic disturbance cap of 5% at the project-area scale. • PHMA: Implement a density cap of an average of 1 energy and mining facility per 640 acres. • PHMA: Surface occupancy and surface-disturbing activities would be prohibited on or within a 0.6-mile radius of the perimeter of occupied GRSG leks. • GHMA: Surface occupancy and surface-disturbing activities would be prohibited on or within a 0.25-mile radius of the perimeter of occupied GRSG leks.
Energy Development—Fluid Minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Open to fluid mineral leasing subject to No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulation within 0.6 miles of an occupied lek, and Timing Limitation (TL) stipulation from March 15 to June 30. • GHMA: Open to fluid mineral leasing subject to NSO within 0.25 miles of an occupied lek and TL stipulations.
Energy Development—Wind Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Avoidance area (may be available for wind energy development with special stipulations)
Infrastructure – major Rights-of-Way (ROW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Avoidance area (may be available for major ROWs with special stipulations)
Infrastructure – minor ROWs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Avoidance area (may be available for minor ROWs with special stipulations)
Mining—locatable minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply RDFs to locatable minerals consistent with applicable law.

Table ES-2
Key Components of the Bighorn Basin Proposed Plan Addressing COT Report Threats

Threats to GRSG and its Habitat (from COT Report)	Key Component of the Bighorn Basin Proposed Plan
Mining—coal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA is essential habitat for GRSG for purposes of the suitability criteria set forth at 43 CFR 3461.5(o)(1).
Livestock Grazing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize the review and processing of grazing permits/leases in PHMA. • The NEPA analysis for renewals and modifications of grazing permits/leases will include specific management thresholds, based on the GRSG Habitat Objectives Table, Land Health Standards, and ecological site potential, to allow adjustments to grazing that have already been subjected to NEPA analysis. • Prioritize field checks in PHMA to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of grazing permits.
Free-Roaming Equid Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update Herd Management Area plans to include GRSG objectives.
Range Management Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow range improvements which do not impact GRSG, or which provide a conservation benefit to GRSG such as fences for protecting important seasonal habitats.
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Do not construct new recreation facilities.
Fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Prioritize suppression immediately after life and property to conserve the habitat. • GHMA: Prioritize suppression where wildfires threaten PHMA.
Nonnative, Invasive Plants Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve GRSG habitat by treating annual grasses. • Treat sites in PHMA and GHMA that contain invasive species infestations through an integrated pest management approach.
Sagebrush Removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHMA: Maintain a minimum of 70 percent of lands capable of producing sagebrush with 10 to 30 percent sagebrush canopy cover. • All BLM use authorizations will contain terms and conditions regarding the actions needed to meet or progress toward meeting the habitat objectives for GRSG.
Pinyon and/or Juniper Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove conifers encroaching into sagebrush habitats, prioritizing occupied GRSG habitat.
Agricultural Conversion and Ex-Urban Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain the majority of PHMA in federal management.

ES.7 SUMMARY

Since the release of the Draft and Supplemental Bighorn Basin RMPs/EISs, the BLM has continued to work closely with a broad range of governmental partners, including the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, the USFWS and US Geological Survey in DOI,

Indian tribes, governors, state agencies, and county commissioners. Through this cooperation, the BLM has developed the Proposed Plan that, in accordance with applicable law, achieves the long-term conservation of GRSG and its habitat.

Conservation of the GRSG is a large-scale challenge that requires a landscape-scale solution spanning 11 western states. The Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS achieves the consistent, range-wide conservation objectives as outlined below. Additionally, the Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS aligns with the State of Wyoming's priorities and land management approaches consistent with GRSG conservation.

Minimize additional surface disturbance. The most effective way to conserve the GRSG is to protect existing, intact habitat. The BLM aims to reduce habitat fragmentation and protect key habitat areas. The Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS minimizes surface disturbance on over 3 million acres of BLM-administered lands by allocating lands as PHMA with decisions that aim to conserve GRSG habitat.

The limitations on mineral and ROW development, along with the disturbance cap, lek buffers, and adaptive management, would result in a net conservation gain for GRSG. The Proposed Plan prioritizes oil and gas development outside of GRSG habitat and focuses on a landscape-scale approach to conserving GRSG habitat. In the context of the planning area, land use allocations under the Proposed Plan would limit or eliminate new surface disturbances in PHMA.

The BLM also updated the Proposed Plan to reflect new GRSG state conservation strategies, including recent State Executive Orders. The objectives of these documents are consistent with the State of Wyoming's Core Area Strategy, which is designed to protect GRSG and its habitat within core areas using a suite of tools and mechanisms that work in concert to conserve GRSG by reducing habitat loss and fragmentation through lek buffers, disturbance limits, excluding activities, and a sophisticated mapping utility to monitor the amount and density of disturbance.

Improve habitat condition. While restoring lost sagebrush habitat can be very difficult in the short term, particularly in the most arid areas, it is often possible to enhance habitat quality through purposeful management. The Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS commits to management actions necessary to achieve science-based vegetation and GRSG habitat management objectives established in the Proposed Plan.

Habitat restoration and vegetation management actions would improve GRSG habitat and prioritize restoration to benefit PHMA. As a result, the restoration and management of vegetation actions would focus on GRSG. For mitigation, the BLM would coordinate with the Wyoming Sage Grouse Implementation Team for application of the "avoid, minimize, compensate" process to ensure anthropogenic activities result in a net conservation gain for GRSG habitat. The Proposed Plan also includes a process for monitoring and adapting to changing

conditions on the landscape. Using monitoring data for population and sagebrush canopy cover, the adaptive management strategy would apply more restrictive management where there is a consistent downward trend. The cause of the downward trend (e.g., anthropogenic disturbance, fire, disease, etc.) would be identified through monitoring data.

Reduce threat of rangeland fire to GRSB and sagebrush habitat.

Rangeland fire can destroy sagebrush habitat and lead to the conversion of previously healthy habitat into landscapes dominated by invasive species. The Bighorn Basin RMP/EIS incorporates Secretarial Order 3336 and sets forth protocols to improve the BLM's ability to protect GRSB habitat from damaging wildfire. Prescribed fire would only be used to improve or maintain habitat for GRSB and to meet specific fuels objective standards.